



# are we keeping pace? SCHOOLS

## **How does Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) plan for enrollment growth?**

Each fall, MCPS planners develop enrollment forecasts for each school, by year, for a six-year period. In addition, a 10th and 15th year are projected to establish the long-range direction of enrollment. These forecasts reflect trends in County births, aging of the student population up through the grade levels and migration of students into the school system. The six-year forecast is aligned with the six-year time frame of the County Capital Improvements Program (CIP) and is the basis for identifying school capacity needs and prioritizing these needs in the requested CIP.

## **How does MCPS account for new housing in enrollment forecasting?**

MCPS planners track new housing that has been approved by the County and cities of Gaithersburg and Rockville. Planners, developers and builders are contacted regularly to determine the pace of construction so that the additional students who will reside in new housing can be included in the forecast for the schools they will attend. MCPS planners conduct research, with the support of the Montgomery County Planning Department Research and Special Projects Division, on the number of students that are “generated” by various types of housing (single-family detached, townhouse or multi-family residences). In addition, MCPS planners regularly sample recently completed housing to fine-tune the “generation” rates. These rates are applied to new housing to estimate the number of students expected.

## **How are school projects prioritized in the CIP?**

Requested projects in the CIP include new capacity projects, revitalization/ expansion of aging schools and systemic maintenance projects. The need to maintain schools in good condition, and periodically revitalize old facilities, competes with adding new capacity. Schools over capacity are ranked by projected space deficits and then prioritized for CIP projects. The order for revitalization/expansion of older schools is based on an assessment of their condition and establishment of a queue. CIP funding for maintenance is based on the level of work needed to keep facilities in good condition.

## **What is the reason some schools become over capacity?**

At any given time, communities are affected to varying degrees by housing turnover, new home construction and demographic change. Schools serving areas impacted more than others may see enrollment climb above a school's capacity. Today, enrollment growth is present in nearly all areas of the County. Consequently, the school system must prioritize capacity projects and is unable to quickly address all space shortages.

In areas with enrollment levels that require opening new schools, deficits at existing schools must be tolerated until a new school opens. It is impractical to open new schools ahead of space shortages at existing schools. Carried to an extreme, this could mean constructing schools that are empty until enrollment begins to justify occupancy. In addition, a critical mass of enrollment is needed at new schools to deliver the educational program.

Classrooms that can be relocated are used until permanent capacity can be built. A frequent misperception is that a school over its capacity will have larger class sizes. This is not the case, since staffing ratios are applied in the same way to all schools. The time frame for addressing space deficits at schools greatly depends on County and State revenues. Enrollment increases, averaging 2,100 per year since 1984, have outpaced funding levels. A consequence is the delay of many projects that are known to be needed but cannot be funded as soon as MCPS and the community would like.

## **How does MCPS look beyond the six-year CIP period?**

The six-year MCPS CIP represents the main facility planning document for the school system. The County requires capital projects to be justified within the six-year CIP period in order to receive funding. However, in addition to CIP programming, MCPS participates with other County agencies in longer term planning. For example, MCPS participates with County and city planning staff and elected officials as master plans and sector plans are being developed. The MCPS role is not to judge the merits of a plan. Instead, the MCPS role is to ensure enrollment trends and facility utilizations are understood as plans are developed and, when plans create a large amount of new housing, to request that future school sites be included. Another example of long-range planning is a new study focused on colocation of schools with other public facilities in the future. As land becomes scarcer, creative ways to site schools will be needed.

## **How are master plans, sector plans, and subdivision plans factored into MCPS planning?**

MCPS participates in the development of master plans and sector plans, with the primary stake being identification of future school sites. Once plans are adopted, MCPS planners stay abreast of development applications. As subdivision plans are approved, the impact of new housing is factored into school enrollment forecasts. Plans with large numbers of housing units, such as Clarksburg, Shady Grove and White Flint, take many years to build, with the pace depending on market conditions and staging elements. The Clarksburg Master Plan was adopted in 1994 and its full build-out will take many more years. A 20- to 30-year build-out period is generally estimated for large plans. Although MCPS planners are aware of the full potential student generation of these plans, it is impractical and financially infeasible to construct all the capacity that will be needed at full build-out. Therefore, capacity projects are timed in parallel with phases of housing construction.